

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Witwer House

other names/site number N/A

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

street & number 504 North First St.

☐ not for publication

city or town Rockford

☐ vicinity

state Illinois

county Winnebago

zip code 61107

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: **national statewide local**

Applicable National Register Criteria: **A B C D**

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

Illinois Department of Natural Resources - SHPO

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1	0	buildings
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	<b>Total</b>

**Number of contributing resources previously  
listed in the National Register**

N/A

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Single Dwelling House

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Domestic/Single Dwelling House

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Italianate/Gothic Revival Influence

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Limestone  
walls: Brick  
  
roof: Asphalt  
other: Porches: Wood

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The Witwer House is an asymmetrical, cross-gabled home constructed in 1876 in the Italianate architectural style with minor Gothic Revival influences. The house is a single-family home consisting of two stories and ten rooms. It is of balloon frame construction with a veneer of Milwaukee brick and a limestone foundation. It is in downtown Rockford, Illinois on the corner of North First Street and Prairie Street, one block east of the Rock River. Both the exterior and interior of the house have been extensively restored after careful research of the physical structure and the history of the property.

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### **Narrative Description**

#### **Setting:**

The Witwer House is located at 504 North First Street in downtown Rockford, Illinois. The lot sits at the corner of North First Street and Prairie Street in a residential neighborhood. The property is five blocks north of East State Street, the main business district, and sits across the street from St. James Church (1853), the first Catholic Church in the city. The property lot slopes down Prairie Street towards the Rock River and one block west sits Rockford Brewing Company (1902). The site consists of the main residence, with main entrance facing First Street, and a carriage house at the southwest corner of the lot on Prairie Street.

#### **General Building Description. Witwer House:**

The Witwer House occupies less than one acre of land and can be accessed by paved entries on the east, south, and west elevations of the house. The home's exterior has been minimally altered since its construction and has undergone intermittent restorations as early as the 1970s. An asymmetrical roof line allows for three prominent gables featured on the east, south, and west elevations and a small gabled dormer on the north elevation. All the windows and doors on the exterior are in a round arch or flattened arch design, including a three-sided, semi-hexagonal bay on the east elevation and a box bay on the south elevation. The house is built with Milwaukee brick, creamy yellow in color, that is contrasted with the Rookwood Green trim, dark green sash, and deep burgundy shutters. Unless otherwise stated, all first story windows of the house have decorative millwork crowns with operable shutters.

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The exterior restoration began in 1975 and included cleaning masonry and tuck pointing (*Fig. 1 and 2*). Original millwork and wood shutters were repaired and restored. All arch windows are original and have been repaired with matching wood storm windows installed. The limestone front porches, which were originally added in 1897, were tuck pointed, wood decking and bead board ceiling were replaced.<sup>1</sup> On the main front porch, non-original columns were removed, and Doric columns installed, matching the one original column that remained. The house had a two-story fire escape type porch added in the 1930s to create a rear exit (*Fig. 2*). The porch was removed, and a new screen porch was constructed with Victorian style chamfered columns, fir bead board ceiling, and arch top screens to match the house sash.

**East Elevation**

The east (front) elevation of the Witwer House faces North First Street. The southern section of this elevation has a set back of about 15 feet from the center section of this elevation- keeping with the design of an asymmetrical floor plan. It also features an uncovered limestone porch with a single-entry, flattened arch door (which leads to the sitting room) covered by an original canopy and a second story, rounded arch window directly above the entrance.

The center of this elevation has a prominent, steeply pitched cross-gabled roof with decorative gable millwork and a setback of about 30 feet from North First Street. This section of the elevation contains a three-sided, semi-hexagonal bay, made up of flattened arch windows. Directly below the gable is a second story rounded arch window.

The northern section of this elevation has a set back of about 5 feet from the center section of this elevation and features a covered limestone porch. The main entrance door is located in this section of the elevation which is a rounded arch, walnut and burl grained wooded door, with an original bronze doorbell and knob set (*Fig. 4-5*). A second story rounded arch window is located directly above the covered porch.

**South Elevation**

The south elevation faces Prairie Street. The western section of this elevation has a set back of about 5 feet from the center section of this elevation. This section contains two, two-over-two, flattened arch basement windows. Above the basement windows are two flattened arch, first story windows. This section also features a staircase and flattened arch entry door (leading to the dining room). Above the first story windows and directly below the roofline are two, second story sash windows.

<sup>1</sup> Rockford Daily Register, May 10, 1879.



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The center section of this elevation features another prominent, steeply pitched gabled roof with decorative millwork at the peak and lower eave and has a set back of about 38 feet from Prairie Street. This section of the south elevation contains two flattened arch basement windows. Above the basement windows is a first story, box bay window made up of flattened arch windows. Directly above the box bay and below the gable is a rounded arch second story window. Also visible from this section of the elevation is a chimney stack, constructed in the same materials as the rest of the home, featuring two chimney pots.

The eastern section of this elevation also has a setback of about 5 feet from the center section and offers another view of the uncovered porch, visible from the north elevation. This section contains a first story, flattened arch window, and a second story, rounded arch window directly above.

**West Elevation**

The west (rear) elevation features a steeply pitched gabled roof with decorative millwork. A paved walkway, allows access to a stairway, which leads to an entry of the first story, screened-in, wooden porch overlooking the lower garden (converted from the two-story fire escape which was added in the 1930s.) Below the porch is a ground-floor entrance to the basement, and two, two-over-two basement windows on both sides of the elevation. A flattened arch window is present on the first story, on the south end of this elevation. Above the porch are three, rounded arch second story windows. Directly below the gable, and unique to this elevation is a round gable window, which faces toward the Rock River (*Fig.3*).

**North Elevation**

The north elevation of the Witwer House runs parallel to the south elevation of the neighboring home about 10 feet away and has a half-hipped roof. The east section of this elevation features a flattened arch, basement window that has been covered for ventilation purposes and a contemporary air conditioning unit is also visible. A flattened arch first story window is present above the basement window and directly above the first story window is a rounded arch second story window. The house's only gabled dormer is located on this section of this elevation and is used for ventilation and air flow to the attic.

The west section of this elevation sets back from the east section by about 3 feet and has a gabled roof. This section of the elevation contains two, flattened arch, basement windows. Above the basement windows are two, rounded arch, first story windows. Directly above the first story windows are two, flattened arch, sash windows, just below the roofline.

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**Witwer House, Interior:**

The interior of the Witwer House has also been minimally altered since its construction, as well as undergone intermittent restorations and includes an entry hall, parlor, sitting room, dinning room, kitchen, powder room, and library on the first story, with a hall landing, two bedrooms, master bedroom, office, studio, and bathroom on the second story. Notable interior features of the Witwer House include a freestanding curved staircase with walnut balustrade (*Fig. 14*) and 10-foot ceilings throughout the first floor. Repeated arch forms are seen in the walnut and burl grained pocket doors, window sash, and bay window plasterwork. Exceptional details include reproduced original stencils in the entry hall and master bedroom, grained arch top dining room doors, and marble fireplaces in the sitting room and master bedroom (*Fig. 10, 11, 12, 13*).

The interior restoration of the Witwer House began in 1976. The decorating of the home incorporates historically appropriate colors and wallpapers. Original wall stencils in the entry hall and master bedroom were uncovered in restoration and were reproduced (*Fig. 10 and 11*). The curved front staircase was restored including refinishing the walnut balustrade (*Fig. 14*). Period light fixtures were collected and then installed throughout the house (*Fig. 15, 16, 17, 18*). In addition to painting and graining in the sitting room, dining room, and front parlor, the white marble fireplace was restored, Bradbury wallpaper hung, and wood floors refinished. The kitchen was done in a style sympathetic to the period with custom pine cabinets, beaded ceiling, reclaimed marble counters, and integrated refrigerator and dishwasher faced with bead board. Lighting and hardware are antiques from the period. The first-floor powder room (formerly a pantry) was redone with salvaged fir bead board wainscot and ceiling, Bradbury wallpaper, period lighting, and an antique marble sink with cast iron base. The second-floor bath has original painted wainscot, an antique claw foot cast iron tub, marble sink top vanity and integrated wainscot shower enclosure.

**Entry Hall**

The entry hall features double arch top walnut grained front doors, freestanding curved staircase with walnut balustrade, reproduced original wall stencil, and walnut grained doors to the library and front parlor (*Fig. 10 and 14*).

**Front Parlor**

The front parlor consists of a three-sash angled bay window with a plaster arch, arch top double hung window overlooking the side porch, walnut grained arch top pocket doors, period wall stencil, and oak flooring.

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### **Sitting Room**

Adjoining the front parlor is the sitting room. The sitting room contains a white marble fireplace, a four-sash bay window with plaster arch, an arch top double hung window (facing south), two sets of arch top grained doors, crown molding, period wall stencil, and plaster ceiling medallion with period chandelier (*Fig. 12 and 16*).

### **Dining Room**

Through the double doors, the adjoining dining room has maple floors, grained wainscot, entrance door to side staircase and garden, and period chandelier (*Fig. 17*).

### **Master Bedroom**

On the second floor, off the hall landing, is the master bedroom. The master bedroom features a grey marble fireplace with carved details, three round top windows looking south, east, and west, and a large reproduced original wall stencil (*Fig. 11*).

### **General Building Description. Carriage House (Contributing):**

A two-story brick carriage house matching the style of the house was built in 1879 (*Fig. 2*). It is situated on the southwest corner of the lot at the lower garden level. It housed a horse, carriage, and a loft for hay. A prominent feature of the carriage house is a large louvered, cross-gabled cupola on the roof ridge. Restoration work included masonry cleaning, tuck pointing, roofing, cupola repair, original shutters restored and custom-made carriage doors.

### **South Elevation**

The south (front) elevation of the Witwer Carriage House features a prominent, steeply pitched, gabled roof and has a setback of about 20 feet from Prairie Street. This elevation features two, flatten arched carriage doors on the first story, and a second story, rounded arch, hay loft door directly below the gable.

### **West Elevation**

The west elevation is parallel to an alley way that runs north to south along the western property boundary. This elevation features a steeply pitched gable. The elevation also has three symmetrically placed, flattened arch, vented openings on the first story. The second story contains a rounded arch hay loft door, and a small, rounded arch window is present directly below the gable.

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**North Elevation**

The north elevation contains no windows. This elevation faces the garden area of the Witwer home. It features two, flattened arch doorway, with two wooden doors.

**East Elevation**

The east elevation, which faces the west elevation of the Witwer House, also features a steeply pitched gable. This elevation contains a first story flattened arch window, and a rounded arch window directly below the gable.

**Carriage House, Interior:**

The interior of the Carriage House at the Witwer property has been maintained and also undergone intermittent restoration such as the main house. The floors are constructed from concrete and the walls remain uncovered, showing the brick veneer on the interior, just as can be seen on the exterior. The interior of the carriage house is now used for various storage necessities on the property.

**Landscaping:**

The property was landscaped in 1989 preserving the limestone wall along Prairie Street. A staircase to the lower garden was added along with limestone retaining walls (*Fig. 3*). The lower garden fence was modeled after a picket found in the carriage house (*Fig. 6 and 7*). Victorian cast iron urns are placed throughout the yard in addition to the original cement planters (*Fig. 8 and 9*). The plantings were chosen to be appropriate to the Victorian era.

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**Integrity Statement:**

The Witwer House at 504 North First Street in Rockford, Illinois, has sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Minimal alterations have been made to the house and contributing carriage house since their completions in 1876 and 1879 respectfully. The minor alterations, modifications, and restorations that have been made, since the house's construction, have had almost no impact on the integrity of the structures. A few exterior storm windows have been added to the house for means of preservation and projection, additionally, the house and carriage house have undergone tuck pointing treatments for means of cleaning and restoration. Intermittent restorations have been conducted with sensitivity to the original structures with much success. While some interior features are not original to the house, they have been curated as to resemble features from the time period in which the house would have been initially furnished. The Witwer House and contributing carriage house resemble a unique local example of a merging of both Italianate and minor Gothic Revival influences and has been deemed as a candidate for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

### Period of Significance

1876-1897

### Significant Dates

N/A

### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

### Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

### Architect/Builder

O.H. Wheat

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The Witwer House, built in 1876, is being nominated under National Register Criterion C in the area of Architecture. It is in exceptional condition with a high-level of original integrity. The house is locally important as an outstanding example of Italianate architecture with Gothic Revival influences that still survives within the downtown river district. The period of significance, 1876-1897, includes the matching brick carriage house, built in 1879, and the addition of the limestone front porches added in 1897. The brick carriage house is unique in Rockford for its style and masonry construction. The Witwer house, and the lot historically associated with it, sits in a prominent location in the heart of Rockford within a residential neighborhood. It is also just up the hill from the Rock River.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **History of Rockford:**

Rockford Illinois is located in Winnebago County of Northern Illinois. The county derives its name from the few Winnebago Native American Tribes that claimed the area for portions of their reservation.<sup>2</sup> Following the Black Hawk war in 1832, the land that is now Rockford and Winnebago County gained popularity as a promising location for settlement, as the war would lead Native Tribes of the area to seek new lands in the neighboring state of Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup>

Traveling from his home state of Virginia, Germanicus Kent and his slave, Lewis Lemon, made the journey to Galena, Illinois, where Kent's brother, Rev. Aratus Kent was residing; Germanicus was hoping to find and maintain financial stability in Galena, just as his brother had.<sup>4</sup> Doing some traveling of his own, Thatcher Blake, would also find himself in Galena, after hearing enticing descriptions of the area from soldiers in St. Louis who had taken part in the Black Hawk War. Together, Kent, Lemon, and Blake would begin exploring and surveying the Rock River valley as early as June of 1834.<sup>5</sup>

Germanicus Kent, Lewis Lemon, and Thatcher Blake came to "Rocky Ford" in 1834 – What is now Rockford, Illinois. At that time, Rockford was a part of Jo Daviess County; Winnebago County was officially established by the Illinois legislature in 1836.<sup>6</sup> The shallow rocky bottom portion of the Rock River provided easy crossing. It was midway between Galena and the village of Chicago. He laid claim to the land and became the first

<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Church, *Past and Present of the City of Rockford and Winnebago County, Illinois*, (Chicago, IL: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1905), 6.

<sup>3</sup> "The Black Hawk War (1832)," March 15, 2017, <http://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/mypath/black-hawk-war>.

<sup>4</sup> "Pioneer Blacks Exercised Financial Independence," *Rockford Register Star*, Feb. 3, 1985, 9A.  
<https://history.rockfordpubliclibrary.org/localhistory/?tag=germanicus-kent>.

<sup>5</sup> Charles A. Church, *History of Rockford and Winnebago County, Illinois: From the First Settlement in 1834 to the Civil War*, (Rockford, IL: W. P. Lamb, Printer, 1900), 26.

<sup>6</sup> Rockford Historical Society, "Rockford's Founding Fathers," accessed Jan. 14, 2021, <https://www.rhsil.org/rockfords-settlers.html>.

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European settler in the area. He was a land speculator and began with a sawmill to attract the settlers moving west from the eastern states. As the town grew, a waterpower district was created along the river and industry followed. By the 1870s the population had grown to 14,000 and Rockford was nicknamed Reaper City because of a high concentration of farm implement manufacturers. Knitting machines and furniture manufacturing followed.<sup>7</sup>

Maintaining the theme of industry and manufacturing, presently, Winnebago County, and Rockford, Illinois, continues to bring opportunities for economic and technological development. As of 2020, Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois, is considered “the nation’s sixth largest concentration of aerospace production workers; every contemporary airplane in the sky today has parts made in the Rockford region.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Italianate Architecture Background:**

Between 1840 and 1870, the Italianate architectural styles became a prominent design for American, Midwestern homes. This style, including the Gothic Revival style- emerging at the same time- began in England during, what historians define, as the Picturesque movement; introduced in the United States as early as 1830. <sup>9</sup> As these two architectural styles gained popularity in congruence to one another, it was not uncommon for one style to have influential characteristics of the other- as seen, here, with the Witwer House. Rachel Carley, in *The Visual Dictionary of Domestic Architecture*, articulates that,

The early Victorian styles, including the Gothic Revival and Italianate, were a direct reflection of the Picturesque, an aesthetic point of view celebrating the variety, texture, and irregularity inherent in nature. This resulted in a new and very strong interest in how a building related to its natural setting. Loggias, verandas, towers, and sleeping porches proliferated to take advantage of uplifting views and healthful fresh air, while asymmetrical floor plans designed to complement the natural site yielded wonderfully odd-shaped rooms.<sup>10</sup>

According to the National Park Service, defining characteristics of the Italianate style architecture include a low, overhanging roof, decorative eaves and brackets, decorative detailing at the roof line, accentuated windows with ornamental hoods, and a projecting porch.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, keeping with ties to surrounding natural elements, Italianate style homes were often wood-framed structures- using wood and other materials from local sources.

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<sup>7</sup> John Lundin, *Rockford: An Illustrated History*, Windsor Publications, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Winnebago County Illinois, “About the County,” accessed Jan. 14, 2021, <https://wincoil.us/about-the-county/>.

<sup>9</sup> McAlester, Virginia, A. Lee McAlester, Lauren Jarrett, and Juan Rodriguez-Arnaiz. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012, 200.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Carley, *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture* (New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks, 1994), 134.

<sup>11</sup> “Italianate Style 1850s,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed January 5, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/italianate-style-architecture.htm>.



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Defining characteristics of the Italianate style in the Witwer House include, accentuated windows with ornamental hoods, projecting porches on both the east (front) and west (rear) elevations, wide or overhanging eaves with decorative millwork, an asymmetrical, rectangular floor plan, and a wooden, Balloon-frame.

### **Balloon Frame Construction:**

The Witwer House has a balloon frame, which was common for houses built between 1850 and 1890. Balloon-frame construction, first developed in Chicago in the 1830s, was a much cheaper and quicker method of construction. Balloon-frame construction is a method in which the 2x4 stringers run upward across the floors, rather than the second story being built atop the first. By framing a house this way, it becomes lighter and more flexible, as well as more durable and affordable. This method of construction was simple enough that an individual did not have to be an architect, or even a skilled carpenter to build a home.<sup>12</sup>

### **Gothic Revival Architecture:**

Sir Horace Walpole, a wealthy Englishman, introduced Gothic Revival architecture when he remodeled his home in a Medieval style in 1749. While this became a popular style in England at this time, it did not reach the United States until it was introduced by Alexander Jackson Davis of Baltimore, Maryland, in 1832.<sup>13</sup> Davis wrote several pattern books for architectural styles of which Gothic Revival was most prominent. In these books, Davis advised that the Gothic Revival style was a design choice for a rural property. Given the nature of the style such as wide gables and tall towers, this style was not suitable for urban conditions; a structure in this style was simply too large for the smaller designed parcels of urban communities. This style fell out of favor for residential architecture by the mid-1860s.

Defining features of the Gothic Revival style include, pointed arch windows and doors, decorative elements including porches and dormers, as well as steeply pitched roofs and front-facing gables with delicate wooden trim. Of these characteristics, only minor influences are found within the Witwer House.

The minor Gothic Revival influences present in the Witwer House include its front-facing gables, steeply pitched roof, and delicate millwork located on the corners and eaves of the roofline. While the Witwer House does have arched windows, they are not pointed-arched windows as would be seen in the Gothic Revival architectural style

<sup>12</sup> "Death of the Dream: The Balloon Frame." PBS Online. [www.pbs.org/ktca/farmhouses/homes\\_balloon.html](http://www.pbs.org/ktca/farmhouses/homes_balloon.html).

<sup>13</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide*, 200.

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### **Italianate Architecture in Rockford:**

Analysis of existing legacy survey data held at the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office recognized twenty-seven other examples of Italianate architecture in the City of Rockford. Of these, seven were identified with a "P" rating indicating primary significance. The "P" rating is understood to be the highest rating from the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (IHSS) conducted between 1971-1975. It signifies that the surveyor considered a building potentially eligible for National Register consideration for architectural significance. The Witwer House is one of the seven houses that received the primary significance rating. A virtual inspection, using Google Earth street view, of these same Italianate properties was also conducted for this nomination. The virtual inspection was able to ascertain degraded exterior integrity on three of the Italianate comparable houses. This includes 826 N. Main Street which has since had its original porch completely enclosed, and 1127 S. Church Street has had its original porch removed and non-historic siding covering the original. Both houses were rated "P" in the IHSS. The Jacoby House, also given a "P" rating, is located 1.6 miles to the north of the Witwer House and is the only individually listed Italianate house in Rockford. It was designated in 1982 and is a towered sub-type of the Italianate style.

### **History of the Witwer House:**

The Witwer House was built in 1876 by O.H. Wheat (builder) for Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Witwer. Mr. Witwer owned a dry goods store (Hough & Witwer) on nearby East State Street and he later became an alderman for the City of Rockford. The carriage house was built in 1879 and is one of a few constructed of brick within the City limits. A May 10, 1879 article in the Daily Register stated, "Alderman Witwer is erecting a fine gothic barn, constructed of Milwaukee brick. It is an adequate compliment to his fine house on First Street and taken both together they make as handsome a piece of property as there is in the city, and very much improve the locality where they are situated."<sup>14</sup>

Another prominent owner (from 1903 to 1933) of the Witwer House was Myron Barnes. His occupation was listed in the City Directory as a tenor. He taught voice lessons in the front parlor, was professor of music at Rockford and Beloit Colleges, and conducted church choirs. His Weber Quartet gained fame in concerts in 29 states, touring some 20,000 miles by train and horse drawn vehicles. In 1889 the Quartet performed at the inaugural festivities for President Benjamin Harrison.<sup>15</sup> A plaster bust of Myron Barnes and concert program remain with the house (*Figure 22 and 23*). The bust is by artist Mrs. Theo Hansen, who attended the Chicago Art Institute and was a student of Laredo Taft.<sup>16</sup>

**Conclusion:**

The Witwer House remains in remarkably original condition and has been thoughtfully restored. The restoration exhibits great attention to detail from the exterior millwork and original shutters to the interior with its meticulously grained walnut and burl wood doors, original wall stencils, and period decorating. The property is further enhanced by the surviving masonry carriage house, also constructed in the Italianate style. The house is locally significant because of its exemplary architectural style. It is one of a few examples in Rockford of a restored Italianate home with Gothic Revival influences of the 1870s. In 2019, the Witwer House was awarded local landmark status by the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission.

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<sup>14</sup> Rockford Daily Register, May 10, 1879.

<sup>15</sup> Rockford Daily Register, March 9, 1889.

<sup>16</sup> Rockford Daily Register Gazette, July 16, 1897.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Witwer House

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
☐ previously listed in the National Register  
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☐ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** Less than one

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>42.272151</u> Latitude	<u>-89.085479</u> Longitude	3	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude
2	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude	4	_____ Latitude	_____ Longitude

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lot Five (5) in Block Twenty (20) East side of the Rock River, Rockford, IL. Located at the corner of North First St. and Prairie St.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Nomination includes the Witwer House, its carriage house, and the property historically associated with it.

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>Kurt Bell</u>	date	<u>8/3/20</u>
organization	<u>N/A</u>	telephone	<u>815-262-8707</u>
street & number	<u>504 N. First St.</u>	email	<u>Bells5085@icloud.com</u>
city or town	<u>Rockford</u>	state	<u>IL</u> zip code <u>61107</u>

Witwer House

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**Additional Documentation**

---

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

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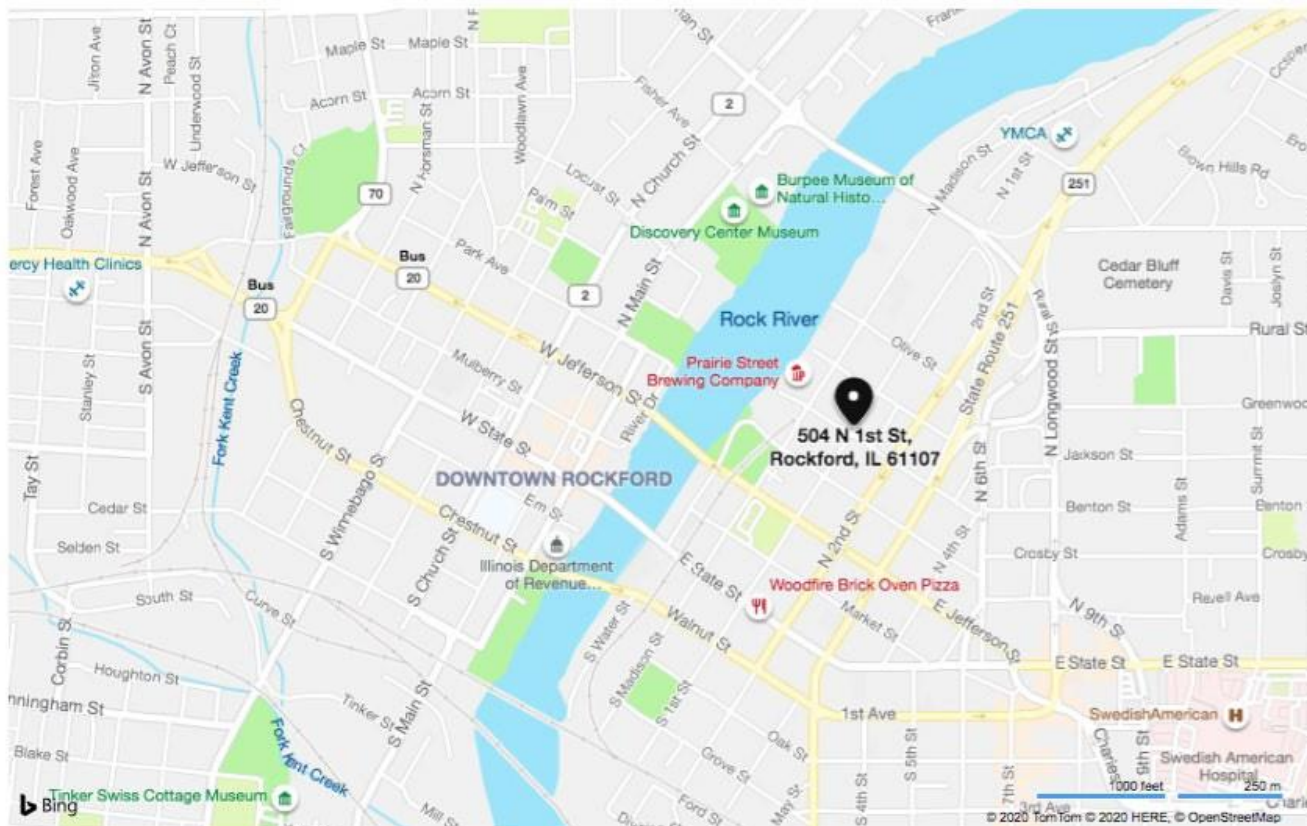
**GIS Location Map:**



504 N 1st St, Rockford, IL 61107

Location: 42.27215167, -89.08547917

Witwer House  
504 N. First St.  
Rockford, IL 61107  
Winnebago County





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### Local Location Map:

Map of local area circa 1880



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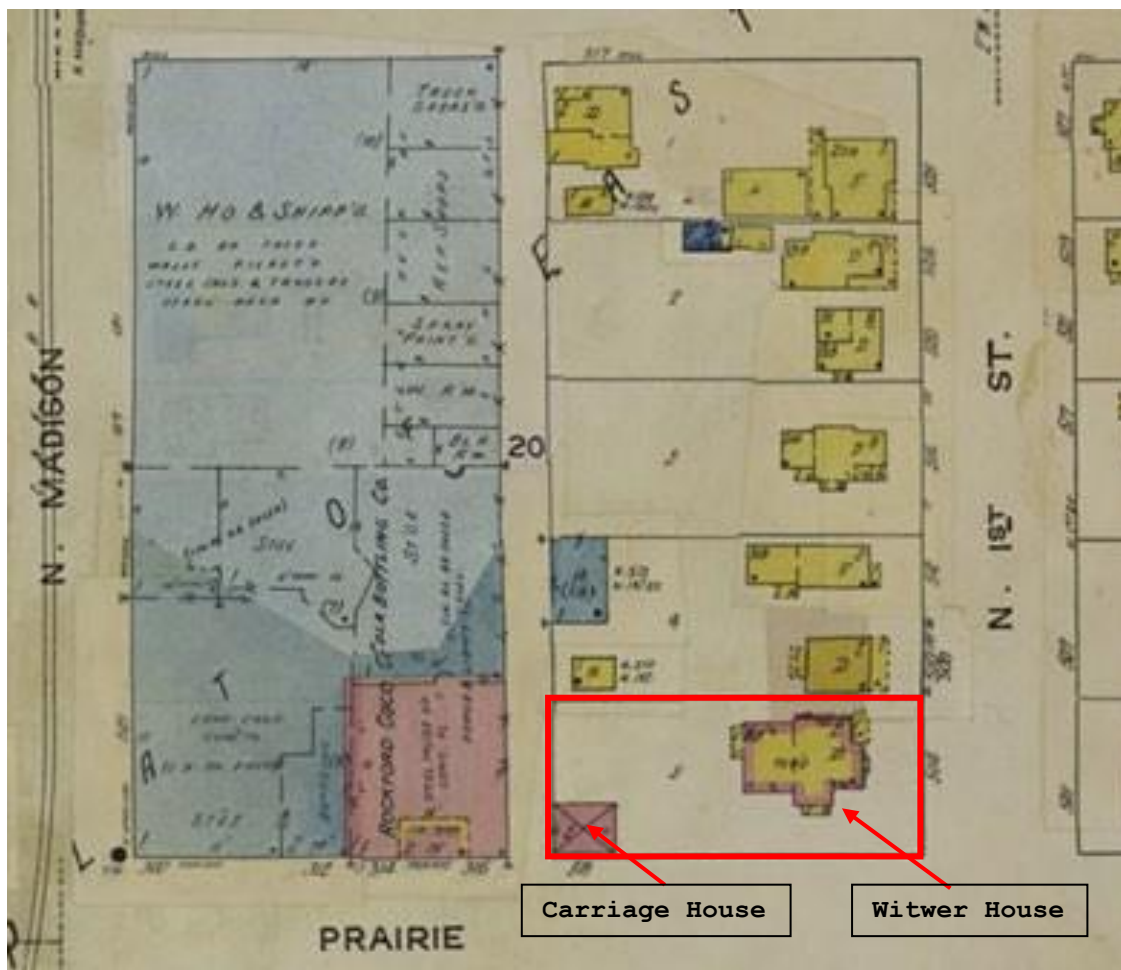
N/A

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### Local Location and Site Map

Sanborn Insurance Map from Rockford, Winnebago County, Illinois circa 1900.



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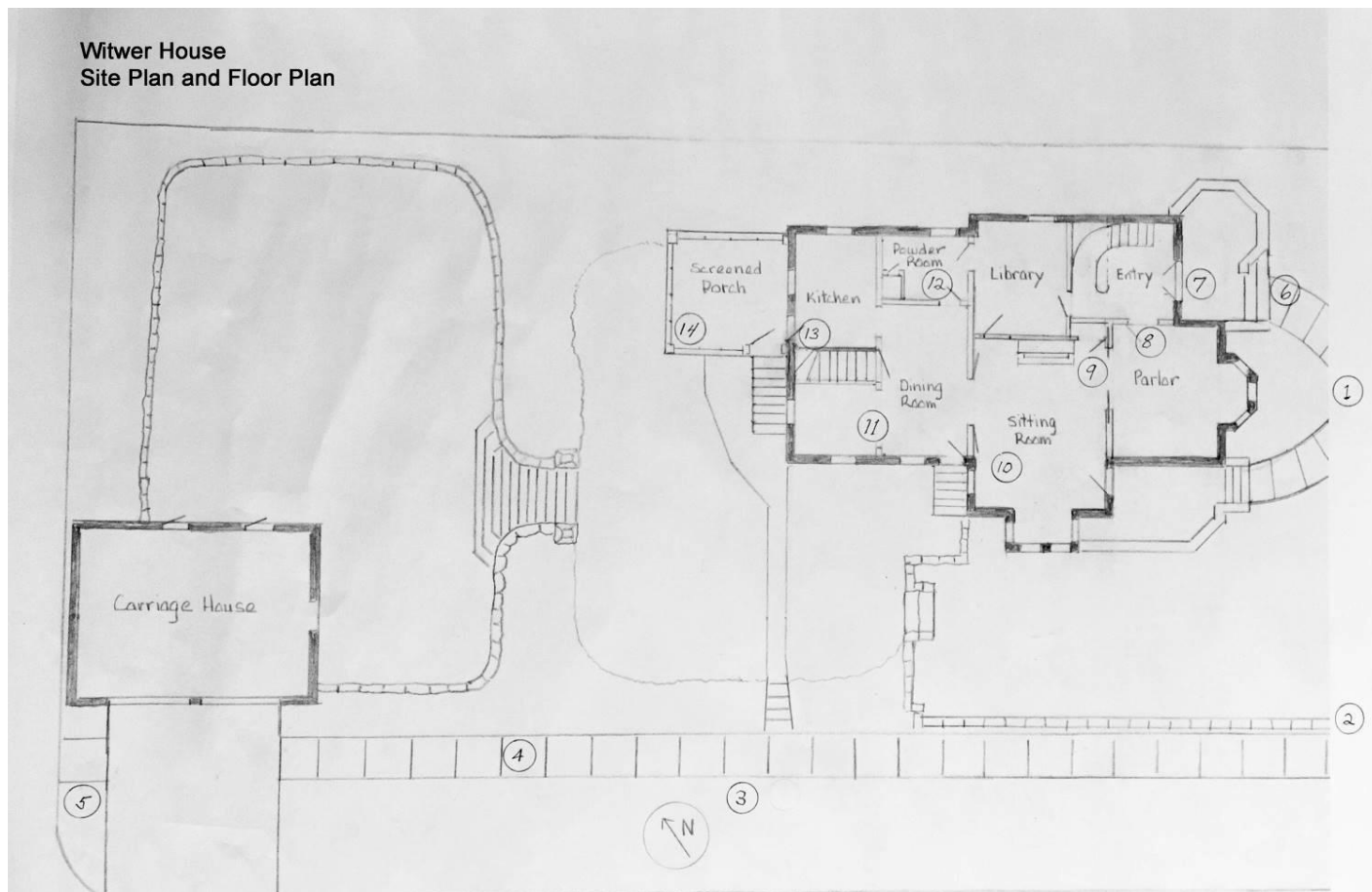
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### Site Plan and First Floor Plan:

Numbers on plan below correspond to photos (photo location map)



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Witwer House

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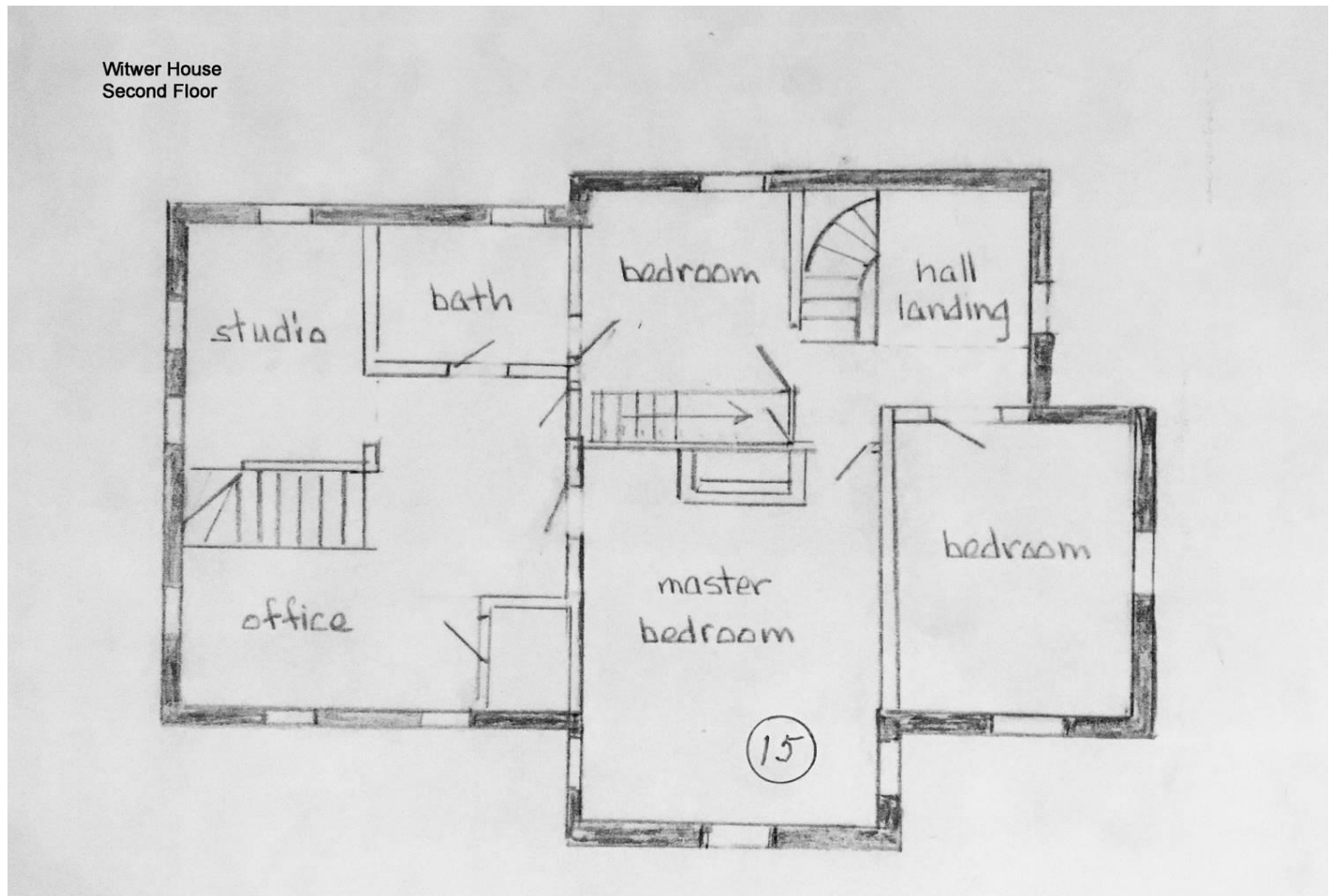
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### Second Floor Plan:

Numbers on plan below correspond to photos (photo location map)



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### List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.)

**Figure 1 of 23:** The Witwer House, 1974

**Figure 2 of 23:** The Witwer House (Carriage House View), 1974

**Figure 3 of 23:** Staircase to Lower Garden

**Figure 4 of 23:** Original Doorknob Set

**Figure 5 of 23:** Original Doorbell Pull

**Figure 6 of 23:** Lower Garden Fence (detail)

**Figure 7 of 23:** Original Picket Found in Carriage House

**Figure 8 of 23:** Victorian Urn, Stairway to Lower Garden

**Figure 9 of 23:** Original Concrete Planters, Side Porch

**Figure 10 of 23:** Reproduced Original Entry Hall Stencil

**Figure 11 of 23:** Reproduced Original Master Bedroom Stencil

**Figure 12 of 23:** Reproduced Walnut/Burl Graining (Dining Room Doors)

**Figure 13 of 23:** Graining Detail

**Figure 14 of 23:** Newel Post (Entry Hall)

**Figure 15 of 23:** Entry Hall

**Figure 16 of 23:** Sitting Room

**Figure 17 of 23:** Dining Room

**Figure 18 of 23:** Kitchen

**Figure 19 of 23:** Lake-Peterson House, 1873 (Rockford, IL)

**Figure 20 of 23:** Lake-Peterson House, Carriage House

**Figure 21 of 23:** Daffodil Cottage, 1843 (Haight Village Historic District, Rockford, Illinois)

**Figure 22 of 23:** Myron Barnes Plaster Bust by Mrs. Theo Hansen

**Figure 23 of 23:** Myron Barnes Concert Program



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**Figure 1:** The Witwer House, 1974



**Figure 2:** The Witwer House (carriage house view), 1974



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**Figure 3:** Staircase to lower garden





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**Figure 4:** Original doorknob set



**Figure 5:** Original doorbell pull





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**Figure 6:** Lower garden fence (detail)



**Figure 7:** Original picket found in carriage house





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**Figure 8:** Victorian urn, stairway to lower garden



**Figure 9:** Original concrete planters, side porch



**Figure 10:** Reproduced original entry hall stencil



**Figure 11:** Reproduced original master bedroom  
Stencil



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**Figure 12:** Reproduced walnut/burl graining  
(Dining Room Doors)



**Figure 13:** Graining detail





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**Figure 14:** Newel post (Entry Hall)



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**Figure 15:** Entry hall



**Figure 16:** Sitting Room



**Figure 17:** Dining Room



**Figure 18:** Kitchen





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**Figure 19:** Lake-Peterson House, 1873 (Rockford, IL)



**Figure 20:** Lake-Peterson House, Carriage House



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**Figure 21:** Daffodil Cottage, 1843 (Haight Village Historic District, Rockford, Illinois)





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**Figure 22:** Myron Barnes plaster bust  
by Mrs. Theo Hansen



**Figure 23:** Myron Barnes concert program





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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---

**Photographs:**

---

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

<b>Name of Property:</b>	<u>Witwer House</u>		
<b>City or Vicinity:</b>	<u>Rockford</u>		
<b>County:</b>	<u>Winnebago</u>	<b>State:</b>	<u>Illinois</u>
<b>Photographer:</b>	<u>Katie Bell</u>		
<b>Date Photographed:</b>	<u>7/30/2020</u>		

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

**Photo 1 of 20:** 504 N. First St., Exterior Frontal View (Facing West)

**Photo 2 of 20:** Corner of N. First St. and Prairie St., Exterior Southeast Corner View (Facing Northwest)

**Photo 3 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Hillside View (Facing North)

**Photo 4 of 20:** Witwer House, North Elevation, View from North First Street, (Facing West).

**Photo 5 of 20:** Witwer House, North Elevation, View from Garden, (Facing East).

**Photo 6 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Carriage House View (Facing North)

**Photo 7 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Southwest Corner Carriage House View (Facing East)

**Photo 8 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior West Elevation of Carriage House View (Facing East).

**Photo 9 of 20:** North Elevation of Carriage House, View from Garden, (Facing South).

**Photo 10 of 20:** Carriage House Interior View.

**Photo 11 of 20:** N. First St., Exterior Front Porch View (Facing West)

**Photo 12 of 20:** Interior Entry Hall (Facing West)

**Photo 13 of 20:** Interior Parlor (Facing South)

**Photo 14 of 20:** Interior Sitting Room (Facing South)

**Photo 15 of 20:** Interior Sitting Room (Facing East)

**Photo 16 of 20:** Interior Dining Room (Facing East)

**Photo 17 of 20:** Interior Powder Room (Facing North)

**Photo 18 of 20:** Interior Kitchen (Facing Northeast)

**Photo 19 of 20:** Screen Porch (Facing Northeast)

**Photo 20 of 20:** Interior Second Floor Master Bedroom (Facing North)

**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 1 of 20:** 504 N. First St., Exterior Frontal View (Facing West).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 2 of 20:** Corner of N. First St. and Prairie St., Exterior Southeast Corner View (Facing Northwest).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 3 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Hillside View (Facing North).



**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 4 of 20:** Witwer House, North Elevation, View from North First Street, (Facing West).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 5 of 20:** Witwer House, North Elevation, View from Garden, (Facing East).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 6 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Carriage House View (Facing North).



**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 7 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior Southwest Corner Carriage House View (Facing East).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 8 of 20:** Prairie St., Exterior West Elevation of Carriage House View (Facing East).





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**Photo 9 of 20:** North Elevation of Carriage House, View from Garden, (Facing South).





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 10 of 20:** Carriage House Interior View.



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**Photo 11 of 20: N. First St., Exterior Front Porch View (Facing West).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 12 of 20: Interior Entry Hall (Facing West).**



**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 13 of 20: Interior Parlor (Facing South).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 14 of 20:** Interior Sitting Room (Facing South).



**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 15 of 20: Interior Sitting Room (Facing East).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 16 of 20: Interior Dining Room (Facing East).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 17 of 20:** Interior Powder Room (Facing North).



**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 18 of 20: Interior Kitchen (Facing Northeast).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 19 of 20: Screen Porch (Facing Northeast).**





**Property name: Witwer House**  
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**Photo 20 of 20: Interior Second Floor Master Bedroom (Facing North).**

